Preface

The motivation for this book was born out of an increasing sense from many involved in defence acquisition (DA) that the explanations provided by the present DA literature were neither sufficiently clear nor comprehensive to inform the needs of practice. Attendance at various international DA conferences, in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North America, and subsequent discussions with attendees left the first co-editor with a sense of a growing discontent across the wider DA community about the inadequacy of the existing DA body of knowledge and the common solutions it was offering. Conversations over several years with practitioners, academics, consultants and postgraduate students researching DA issues tended to reinforce the impression that there was a weak, but nonetheless real and expanding, disgruntlement with DA’s inability to provide an account of how it worked and a justification as to why. This group seemed to represent—at the very least—a sizeable minority of actors involved in various aspects of DA. While all expressed concerns at what they perceived as the inadequacies of the present state of DA knowledge, it also appeared that the closer these DA actors were to the practitioner level, the more likely they were to express views ranging all the way from mild frustration through to despair. The reason most commonly expressed for their varying levels of despondency was that the dominant DA discourse had a way of crowding out the different concerns and views they attempted to raise. Because so many expressed such a view, this at the very least suggested there were some serious gaps in the knowledge base underpinning DA, which in turn prompted the question of whether these actors were simply voices at the margin of DA or if they in fact represented a larger group being marginalized by the dominant DA discourse.

The dominant DA discourse about which the various DA actors were expressing concern was characterized by strong claims around the ability of competition to deliver endless progress, and by implication, notions that if large, ongoing improvements were not being made, it was the actors at fault, not the competitive market model itself. This discourse acknowledged that while there were common, persistent, and recurring problems with DA, the general course that had been set was the correct one, particularly in regards to the use of competition, and therefore needed no critical appraisal. Rather, all that was needed, was for an ever greater application and effort to be made toward implementing the present course and all DA’s enduring problems would eventually be resolved. Even if, in the long sweep of history, this claim was ultimately proven to be true, it would in no way diminish the need to work through the present difficulties DA actors face.

A strong case to investigate the diverging views in DA was made even more compelling by clear evidence that the vast majority of actors experiencing difficulties with the dominant discourse generally accepted its foundational assumptions, including the ability of markets to deliver superior results. These actors were, by and large, highly intelligent and shared a strong commitment to making DA work within
the existing policy environment they found themselves in. They had, therefore, no intrinsic desire to challenge the status quo. However, confronted by their own ‘real world’ experiences, they were conflicted in their ability to support present explanations for failures and sub-optimal outcomes. Specifically, they felt that DA was a far more complex topic than present explanations alluded to and that there was need to acknowledge the inadequacies and start developing more comprehensive explanations on how to deal with the complexities.

Dissonance between explanations offered by the dominant discourse and the day-to-day experiences of many DA actors mirrored a difficulty common to most emerging knowledge fields—the classic problem of the ‘theory-practice divide.’ The specifics which generated the manifestation of this problem in DA however, was unclear. In general terms, the logical response to gaining a better understanding of a theory-practice divide would be to conduct a simultaneous examination of both theory (as represented by the dominant discourse) and practice (based on the experiences of DA actors). In the case of DA, however, it appeared that a more appropriate course of action would be to start with an investigation of theory alone, for three key reasons. First, it was the practitioners who had had the problem with theory and not the reverse. Second, as all defence organizations are continually engaged in DA practice there is already a great deal happening in practice. Third, the massive number and continuing rate of reforms to DA practice have been well documented and constantly reviewed. There is, therefore, no shortage of material on practice. As the opposite appeared to be true in the case of theory, it became the starting point for this investigation.

Research soon revealed the difficulties in locating anything that could be justifiably identified as constituting a theory of DA (refer to Chapter 1 for discussion of what constitutes a theory). In terms of sheer numbers, economic theory dominated the DA environment, but it alone was not capable of covering what was already widely accepted as being a multi-disciplinary activity. The first co-editor began checking his assumptions with academic colleagues interested in DA within the United Kingdom (UK) and found none able to define a discrete DA theory. To further explore the topic of theory informing DA, a one-day mini-conference was convened in Munich early in 2014. The attendees consisted of DA academics from Germany, Sweden and UK, and they all reached the same conclusion as to the state of DA theory, namely that no such theory existed. A special two-day international conference was subsequently arranged at Cranfield University in the UK later in 2014 to explore this question. This was attended by delegates from many major western democracies (e.g. USA, UK, France, Germany, Finland and Greece). As it appeared likely this conference would confirm the absence of a substantive DA theory, and that a great deal of effort and academic rigor would be required to capture the discussion on the broader issues affecting theory development, the assistance of the second co-editor was sought so as to capture all the conference presentations along with the additional comments and reflections made by attendees. When we (the co-editors) reviewed everything from the conference, our analysis reinforced prior findings – that no identifiable DA theory existed. Hence this book was developed, representing one more step in a long process aimed at creating a broader discussion around the theory or theories that do, or should, inform modern DA practice.

Mounting an argument claiming that work is required to develop a DA theory may initially appear counterintuitive. Across the western world, considerable resources continue to be spent churning out research by Masters and PhD students specializing in DA. Eminent professors write books on the topic, governments frequently spend small fortunes commissioning studies aimed at improving DA practices, and various audit offices churn out lengthy documents on this subject. Media outlets, the print media in particular, frequently comment on DA, especially its shortcomings. It can hardly be claimed, therefore,
that DA is an under-researched topic. Nor can it be reasonably claimed that the individuals and groups
drawn from various organizations to carry out the research lack the required competencies to do such
work. As already mentioned, a great deal of the effort that has gone into improving DA has been well-
supported by highly competent people. Based on our analysis, the apparent lack of progress towards a
unified DA theory is due to the present body of DA knowledge being so complex and highly fragmented
it has defied being drawn into a coherent, holistic theory. While the various research initiatives to date
have looked at specific and complex issues and concepts, there is little evidence to suggest DA theory
has been treated seriously from the perspective of being a network of interrelated concepts. All defence
organizations attempt to ‘join-up-the-dots’ by developing operating frameworks and voluminous proce-
dures manuals. As impressive and practical as these manuals are, they largely describe what to do rather
than explain causal relations and, therefore, do not articulate a holistic theory.

The core assumption behind this book is that no comprehensive DA theory as yet exists and there is
a need to understand why this is so. Furthermore, the absence of such a theory is highly undesirable for
DA as, given its core role in modern defence organizations, it needs to be able to demonstrate to all key
stakeholders (e.g. government, industry and community) that they can have trust in the recommendations
it makes on how best to spend vast sums of public money. A failure to be able to generate such trust will
continue to undermine the reputation of defence organizations which will, in turn, make it even harder
for them to operate effectively. One key step in generating stakeholder trust is being able to demonstrate
that the various actions taken with DA are based on the most up-to-date, valid and reliable methodolo-
gies. The most commonly accepted way of inspiring that faith is to provide evidence that practice is
underpinned by a well thought-out theory. At the very least, developing such a theory involves declaring
presuppositions in order to expose them to rigorous critique, thereby reducing the potential for building
a foundation based on falsehoods. Because DA’s present state of theory development falls short of such
a standard, it is open to the very undesirable charge of poor theory development.

The following examples of common types of poor theory development illustrate why this is an un-
desirable state of affairs for DA. Poor theory includes:

- **Pseudoscience**: A theory that makes use of the style and conventions of science without any
  legitimate claim to the status of science. Deficiencies include lack of explanatory power, lack of
  coherent systems of concepts, and propositions, and a shortage of empirical support. DA’s pres-
  ently fragmented state of theory development suggests it could well be accurately described as a
  pseudoscience.

- **Theoretical Monism**: There are many dangers associated with adopting one theory as the only
  lens for understanding practice because it then forces all observations into a form consistent with
  that theory, blindsides other useful theoretical perspectives, and lessens the probability of find-
  ing a good match between theories and the problems being faced. The modern tendency by many
  governments to emphasise economics as the main means by which to ultimately assess everything
  suggests that DA is at risk of theoretical monism. While there is hope of finding a unified field
  of DA knowledge, such a task is extremely challenging and perhaps, ultimately unattainable. It
  is however, also dangerous to deny such complexity and engage with something more akin to a
  mysticism by giving an illusion of unity to the whole.

- **Theory Cults**: Professionals give theory advocates the status of authority figures. Such adora-
  tion reduces critical thinking, increases destructive antagonism toward all who challenge theo-
  retical ideas, and deepens reluctance to subject theory to scientific and logical tests. This type
of poor theory creates many challenges for DA. Specifically, there is no doubt that if DA is to achieve large-step improvements it cannot rely on small incremental-step improvement strategies. Achieving such large improvements may require taking on radical reforms for which no clear theoretical insights have yet been developed. While DA theory may be more limited in such circumstances, this does not mean that having such a theory would be a complete waste of effort. On the contrary, because many radical reforms are on offer and the consequences of getting things wrong are massive, having such a theory is more likely to help eliminate poor proposals and assists in discerning which of the more radical reforms being offered has the greatest substance and potential. Having the option of being able to more critically assess proposals is particularly important in DA, which by its very nature is highly political. It is extremely important to ensure that when ideas are adopted, it is because they are meritorious, not because they were proposed by individuals with the great charisma or with the high political influence. This point is important because we live in an era where corporate warriors have long been displacing military warriors and are therefore more effective at influencing key stakeholders than personalities drawn from defence. The danger of relying on such powerful personalities from a theory perspective is easily revealed by an examination of the plethora of books by current and past Chief Executive Officers – they struggle to grasp that an autobiography does not equate to a management theory.

What follows in this book is not intended to solve the theory development in DA, poor or otherwise, but is an effort to open up discussion about the current limitations. In line with the best principles of effective learning, the focus of the search at this early stage is not on finding answers but on asking better questions. The first step in such a process involves breaking out of the imprisoning frame of ideas which have to date compelled DA to operate in specific ways. Breaking away from the certainty of existing mental models can be very disruptive and is not guaranteed to yield superior results. Yet to simply continue following existing recipes in a ‘practice-theory cookbook’ approach will not generate the innovate responses being demanded of modern DA. Critically reflecting on old and existing knowledge and practice wisdom in order to move beyond their clear limitations is an important aspect of theory development.

The purpose of the chapters that follow is to demonstrate both the complex issues with which DA is struggling and the need to engage with them in a different manner. If this is not done, there is a real risk that existing DA knowledge will give neither the proper diagnosis for its own ills nor the proper treatment. This book represents, therefore, a first step in a long journey towards trying to better understand the relationship among the various areas of thought in DA and the question of whether the existing chasms confronting them can be bridged to allow the emergence of a unified theory for DA. This may well prove impossible and DA may be forced to operate within a non-unified concept of knowledge. However, as the journey is necessary irrespective of the destination reached, what follows in this book remains relevant under either scenario.

Before outlining the contribution of each chapter, the combined intent of all chapters is explained. While most chapters tend to throw a spotlight on weaknesses in various components of DA, it does not follow that they are advocating a return to some idealized, superior, past state. DA has never enjoyed such a state; however, the neoliberal agenda presently directing DA is in fact returning to the past through its relentless push to continuously increase outsourcing. The combined purpose is how to better prepare DA for present and uncertain future challenges, and within the context of a western styled democratic state. Also, while the tone of most of the chapters is academic, the aim is not to generate a form of abstract objectivism which cannot be applied in practice, but to produce explanations which can assist in improving practice. A more detailed explanation of each chapter now follows.
Because of the diversity of the topics covered, discussion of the chapters cannot be clustered around tightly bound themes. Nevertheless, Chapters 1 to 6 tend to converge, in their different ways, on demonstrating the unintended consequences produced when DA implementation occurs via a neoliberal agenda, many of which are of highly questionable benefit to the overall aims of DA. Chapter 7 on professionalism by Moore is located centrally for two reasons; first, because it covers educational requirements thereby automatically relating to the knowledge issues contained in all the other chapters and, second, because it helps form a natural bridge between the macro-level issues covered in the preceding chapters and the meso-level issues covered in subsequent ones. Chapters 8 to 12 explore what is needed in order to achieve the outcomes sought by neoliberalism – such as greater entrepreneurial flair, open innovation, new ways of working collaboratively, and the shift from buying goods to buying services. Chapter 13 stands alone as it covers an area which DA will need to master, namely how to better manage scarce resources within increasingly demanding requirements about the environment. Chapters 14 and 15 explore how the application of a different management philosophy (pragmatism) and a more synergistic approach to strategic planning and leadership may improve DA. Because Chapter 16 discusses the role of theory in the wider sense outlined in Chapter 1 but from a different perspective, these first and last chapters are logical book-ends within which to contain all the others.

In Chapter 1, Burgess outlines what is meant by the term ‘theory’ and why it is important for DA to have a theory. He then goes on to demonstrate how present DA explanations fall short of what would constitute a sound theory, before suggesting possible research topics which could assist in accelerating DA’s theory development. This chapter claims that such a development is urgently required as the choice is not between theory and no theory but between theory and bad theory. It also provides an overview of the broad range of topics impacting on DA, many of which are examined in more depth in subsequent chapters. Taylor in Chapter 2 challenges perhaps the most foundational assumption informing the present policy framework and direction of DA – that of the application of competition is universally desirable. Several other chapters, in their various ways, also demonstrate that neoliberalism’s ideals around competition fall well short of the realities of DA. Louth’s contribution in Chapter 3 sets about challenging what many commentators would see as the next most important element in the implementation of neoliberalism within the public sector, namely the widespread adoption of managerialism. While acknowledging the poor past practices of DA, this chapter goes on to question if managerialism – and its associated discourse – is the vehicle best suited for DA. Chapter 4 by Bishop continues to examine the transformation that has taken place to the state, defence and the defence industrial base as a result of the ongoing reforms to DA, coming primarily from the widespread adoption of the neoliberal agenda. Bishop uses the concept of polyarchy – how states have progressively reduced their power by moving from the role of orchestrator of all activities within the nation state to one of becoming one powerful actor among many such actors – to examine DA development. If correct, this analysis helps provide insights into why present DA policy frameworks struggle to deliver the desired results. Chapters 5 and 6 take a different turn in that rather than illustrating the gap between the idealised rhetoric and reality, both suggest it would be more productive to work from where the world is at, as a result of these reforms. Balakrishnan in Chapter 5 discusses how, despite being criticized by most economic theorists, offsets are a part of DA activity for most nations and this trend continues to grow. She suggests that, rather than trying to continue treating offsets as some form of aberration to be eliminated, more could be achieved by integrating them into DA theory. To round off the chapters concerned with the macro issues surrounding neoliberalism, Newall’s Chapter 6, seeks to move beyond the competitive market model.
as it is presently understood and to reconceptualise DA from an ecosystem perspective. While such an approach shows great promise, it also challenges many of the present assumptions around competition and organizational identity.

Professionalism, as covered by Moore in Chapter 7, needs little justification for inclusion as its importance to the present and future of DA effectiveness is well understood. However, DA is at a particular disadvantage as a key step in achieving professional status involves first having a well-developed theory. Even if such a theory could be developed, it will still leave open the question of how to accelerate the ongoing development of DA professionals. Moore explores potential issues associated with such professional development.

The next four chapters delve into the complexities involved in trying to access expensive, battling-winning technology and leading-edge business processes within tightly bounded financial constraints. Bellais and Droff address in Chapter 8 another core concept of great concern, namely accessing advanced technology. They introduce some interesting ideas around why present DA processes will underachieve in this domain and why a paradigmatic shift is needed to ensure the improvements demanded of DA are achieved. In Chapter 9, McAvoy touches on related issues when he examines the role of institutional logics and how these can impede access to the entrepreneurial capability sought through market engagement. Heuninckx in Chapter 10, examines the multitude of issues associated with collaborative defence procurement. This is yet another topic area of increasing relevance to DA as the costs associated with gaining and maintaining access to advanced and expensive technology are often beyond the reach of nations acting alone. Glass and Essing explore in Chapter 11 another major trend which is radically altering the nature of DA – that is, the shift away from buying goods to buying services. Chapter 12 by Wylie explores the inherent tensions involved in DA activities having to produce greater levels of innovation and do so within policy frameworks that demand demonstrable value for money.

The remaining chapters cover a variety of issues. In Chapter 13, Powell-Turner and Antill examine key factors which could affect the future availability of raw materials vital to UK defence, using rare earth elements (REE) as an example. Issues discussed include ensuring a supply of materials crucial to the production of high-tech defence equipment within tightening regulatory policy, working within varying export policy requirements, and promoting greater efficiency in resource use consistent with rising environmental concerns. Snider explores an alternative intellectual engagement with DA, in Chapter 14, by introducing and applying pragmatic philosophy. While this promising philosophy was developed in the United States in the nineteenth century, and largely abandoned in the twenty century, it has made a resurgence in the present century. It may well offer a way of unlocking DA from its past limitations. In a similar vein, Neal, in Chapter 15, touches on the sort of rethinking needed to bring about the transformational changes sought by DA, and does so using the lens of strategic and change management. Finally, in Chapter 16, LeFevez argues the case for applying social science approaches to DA theory development to broaden, beyond hard science, the conceptual lens that DA uses to inform its decisions. She makes the point that using soft systems could improve hard systems outcomes in areas such as technology.

Before engaging in the material in this book it is worth being reminded of Kurt Lewin’s famous quote, “there is nothing so practical as a good theory”. To that end, the aim of this book is to enrich readers’ understandings of why the complexities of DA require the development of a more coherent theory. Further, it is hoped that readers will feel prompted to engage more critically in wider discussions about how to generate both an improved body of DA knowledge and, ultimately, a theory of DA.
ENDNOTE

The contributors to this book come from many different countries within which different versions of English, both official and unofficial, are used. To maintain the integrity of the original contributions, the decision has been taken not to standardize vocabulary and spelling.